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Assessment of Final Year Law Students Access to and use of Electronic Legal Journals: A Case Study of Oluayola Law Library, College of Law, AFE Babalola University ADO-EKITI, Nigeria

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Abstract

Electronic legal journals are vital electronic information resources that are germane to legal research development and advancement. The study assesses the final year law students access to and use of electronic legal journals: A case study of Oluayola Law Library, College of Law, Afe Babalola University. Five research questions guided the study and the data collection instrument used was structured questionnaire. The study adopted survey descriptive research method. The findings of the study show that the respondents use electronic legal journals mostly occasionally. It also reveals that majority of the respondents mostly access electronic databases like Elaw, Compulaw, Lexis Nexis and Jstor. Also they indicated that electronic legal journals are very vital to their academic growth and accomplishment. Based on the level of preference, majority of the respondents prefer to access both print and electronic legal journals. Finally, the hindrances to law students access to and use of electronic legal journals are poor connectivity of the Internet, lack of well-organized homepage of library with links to the e-journals and lack of printer in the law library to print downloaded materials. Therefore, the study recommends that universities should endeavour to maintain effective Internet connectivity, design library Web portals and should provide printers in their e-libraries in order to enable students print downloaded documents.

Keywords: Access, Use, electronic legal journals, Law Libraries, Nigeria.

Introduction: The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has radically changed the conventional library setting. Therefore providing patrons with e-

resources beyond their immediate environment. However, with the capabilities of the Internet and computer technology, law libraries in Nigerian universities are now being automated; thereby integrating legal electronic resources to meet the information needs of the Net generation students. Mafix Digital (2010) affirms that the law library is a gateway to online collections of electronic legal materials which include LexisNexis, Westlaw, Hein online, Justus and so on. Tyagi (2011) asserts that law libraries can no longer depend on conventional information sources to cope with the latest development in their respective fields. Since electronic legal journals are vital information sources to legal research and final year law students at this stage of their scholastic pursuit are conscientiously writing long essays which demand them to consult these information resources for quality research. This is why, the study assesses the final year law students' access to and use of electronic legal journals.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of this study is to assess the final year law student's access to and use of electronic legal journals. The specific objectives to the study are to:

1. find out the frequency of use of electronic legal journals by law students;
2. ascertain the accessibility of electronic legal Journals by law students;
3. determine the relevance of electronic legal journals by law students;
4. find out the level of preference of use;
5. find out the challenges encountered on the access to and use of electronic legal journals.

Literature Review: Journals have long been a pivotal means of delivering scholarly research and recent trends and issues by experts in different fields of knowledge; it serves as the primary source of disseminating knowledge and establishing authority in a field. Print journals that serve this function successfully have been stable in form and content for a long period of time, although the continued viability of this format has been questioned for almost as long, particularly in terms of timeliness, quality, accessibility, and cost (Schaffner, 1994 and Piternick, 1989). The advent of ICT has created a new mode of access to journal collection in the library; thereby building an enabling platform accessible to all users at any time and in any location. The exponential growth of information resources has created a form of access which is paramount to the demands of today's information users (Ogbuiyi, Oriogu, Momoh & Ogbuiyi, 2015).

However, Smith (2003) defines e-journal as 'any journal that is available online, including both electronic only journals, and journals that are available both electronically and in print'. Therefore, electronic legal journals are online based journals resources in every aspect of legal education and practice. This platform has provided an easy means of access to legal research and scholarship. Also enables institutions to explore the developments, ethics and different dimensions to legal issues, evidence and practice.

According to Cook and Jones (2000), electronic journals are provided to subscribers through the following types of medium which includes free access, exclusive subscription,

selective access, fee-based access and consortium-based access. They also stated that e-journals were predominately distributed through subscription from the publishers or through aggregator databases. The law librarian's role in promoting effective access to electronic legal journals have been targeted towards providing different links to e-databases and open access legal to resources that supports the 21st Century law students information seeking behaviour. Also legal educators have a greater role to play in recommending and encouraging students to use electronic legal journals in research and scholarship. Since research is one of the cardinal points of academic activity which had been identified as an important indicator for evaluating academics in all areas of accomplishments and traditionally regarded as 'indices of academic excellence' (Ajegbomogun, 2011).

Therefore, the introduction of e-journals has enabled library researchers to carry out user studies on a much more detailed level and with much less effort than has been possible in the print environment (Park, 2007; Voorbij and Ongerling, 2006). According to Bonthron (2003) study titled 'Trends in use of electronic journals in higher education in the UK - Views of Academic staff and students' to examine disciplinary differences in the use of electronic journals. The results of the study reveals that academic staff incorporates electronic journal usage into their working patterns in different ways than students and that these differences may affect attitudes towards support services (library Web pages, Virtual Learning Environments) designed to promote electronic journal usage. The study of Velmurugan (2013) on the awareness and usage of electronic journals among undergraduate students in an Engineering College Central Library, Chennai, Tamilnadu India shows that majority of the respondents 67 (53.18 %) access electronic journals once in a week and mostly limited by deficiency of timing to access e-journals. In the Nigerian context, Eyaufe, Golley, and Brume-Ezewu (2010) studied the awareness and use of e-journals by medical students of Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU) and University of Benin, Benin City (UNIBEN), the findings reveals that the respondents have low level of awareness of e-journals and low computer literacy skills which results to poor usage of the e-journals. The findings of Olorunsola and Adeleke (2011) revealed that Nigerian universities subscribe to e-journals, i.e. full-text journals. They employ acceptable models for subscriptions, however, they use consortium more than any other model. Most libraries want to retain print format. Based on the proliferation of electronic journals, numerous studies have examined issues in the wider context of access and use among academics and scholars. Still, comprehensive research in the area of electronic legal journals among final year law students has been rather limited. This is why the study focuses on the final year law student because this is the period they prepare for their long essays. The study aims to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on examining the access to and use of electronic legal journals among law students in Afe Babalola University.

Statement of the problem: Electronic legal journals are vital to research and academic excellence of law students. Therefore providing access by law libraries is essential for wider use by students in doing quality research. Lack of subscription has invariably resulted to limited access and use in most law libraries in universities in Nigeria which forms the basis

for this study. Also, despite efforts to intensify access, research studies on the use of electronic resources, have reported low use of e-journals from the university library (Isah, 2010; Egberongbe, 2011). There are limited studies on electronic legal journals among law students. Most of the studies investigated academics and researchers; relegating students which forms the nucleus of the university population. This is why the study tends to assess the final year law students' access to and use of electronic legal journals in College of law library, Afe Babalola University, Nigeria.

Methodology: Survey descriptive research method was adopted for the study and structured questionnaire was used to collect data. A total of hundred (100) final year law students of College of Law Library, Afe Babalola university library users were sampled, out of which seventy three (73) was completed for analysis using descriptive statistics to answer the research questions. Thus, Random sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaire.

Scope of the Study:

The study focus on the access to and use of electronic legal journals in Oluayola Law Library, College of Law, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti. Specifically, the study focuses on the final year law students of the college.

Analysis of Findings

Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

Sl. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	29	39.7
2	Female	44	60.3
	Total	73	100.0

Table 1 shows that 29(39.7%) of the respondents were male and 44(60.3%) were female.

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Age

Sl.No.	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1	15-18	4	5.5
2	19-21	53	72.6
3	22-24	15	20.5
4	25 and above	1	1.4
	Total	73	100.0

Table 2 above shows that 4(5.5%) of the respondents were within the ages of 15-18 years, 53(72.6%) were aged 19-21 years, 15 (20.5%) were aged 22-24 years, while 1(1.4%) was above the age of 25 years.

Table 3: Frequency of Use of Electronic Legal Journals

Sl.No.	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Daily	21	28.8
2	Weekly	14	19.2
3	Monthly	6	8.2
4	Bi-Monthly	1	1.4
5	Occasionally	31	42.5
	Total	73	100

Table 3 shows the rating of the items on frequency of use of electronic legal journals by the respondents as follow: Daily 21 (28.8%), Weekly 14 (19.2%), Monthly 6 (8.2%), Bi-monthly 1 (1.4%) and Occasionally 31(42.5%).

Table 4: Accessibility of Electronic Legal Journals and Databases

Sl. No.	E-Journals and Databases	Yes	Somewhat	Never	Mean	SD
1	Central law library	23 31.5%	28 38.4%	22 30.1%	1.99	0.79
2	African Journals Online	15 20.5%	31 42.5%	27 37.0%	2.16	0.74
3	Duke law Journals	4 5.5%	27 37%	42 57.5%	2.52	0.60
4	The European Journal of current legal issues	8 11.0%	25 34.2%	40 54.8%	2.44	0.69
5	Heinoline	6 8.2%	23 31.5%	44 60.3%	2.52	0.65
6	Elaw	46 63%	15 20.5%	12 16.4%	1.53	0.77
7	Law Pavilion	52 71.2%	17 23.3%	4 5.5%	1.34	0.58
8	Compulaw	33 45.2%	25 34.2%	15 20.5%	1.75	0.78
9	Lexis Nexis	46 63.0%	22 30.1%	5 6.8%	1.43	0.62
10	JSTOR	32 43.8%	28 38.4%	13 17.8%	1.74	0.75

Table 4 shows the rate of the accessibility of scholarly electronic legal journals: Duke law Journals and Heinoline ranked highest in the mean score rating (Mean = 2.52), and was followed by The European Journal of current legal issues (Mean = 2.44), African Journals Online (Mean = 2.16), Central Law Library (Mean = 1.99), Compulaw (Mean = 1.75), JSTOR (Mean = 1.74), Elaw (Mean = 1.53), Lexis Nexis (Mean = 1.43) and lastly followed by Law Pavilion (Mean = 1.34).

Table 5: Relevance of electronic legal journals

Sl.No.	Relevance	Yes	Somewhat	Never	Mean	SD
1	It gives me reliable information of recent legal issues	60 82.2%	11 15.1%	2 2.7%	1.21	0.47
2	It provides relevant information for my research	57 78.1%	8 11.0%	8 11.0%	1.33	0.67
3	It helps me to upgrade my knowledge in the area of my legal specialization	47 64.4%	23 31.5%	3 4.1%	1.40	0.57
4	It helps me in writing good literature review	35 47.9%	36 49.3%	2 2.7%	1.55	0.55
5	It helps me to have link to varied scholarly legal research around the world	55 75.3%	15 20.5%	3 4.1%	1.29	0.54

Table 5 shows the rating of the items on the relevance of electronic legal journals as follows; It helps me in writing good literature review (Mean = 1.55) was ranked highest in the mean score rating and was followed by It helps me to upgrade my knowledge in the area of my legal specialization (Mean = 1.40), It provides relevant information for my research (Mean = 1.33), It helps me to have link to varied scholarly legal research around the world (Mean = 1.29) and lastly followed by It gives me reliable information recent legal issues (Mean = 1.21)

Table 6: Level of Preference of Use

Sl. No.	Version	Frequency	Percentage
1	Electronic/Online journals	16	21.9
2	Print journals	14	19.2
3	Both	43	58.9
	Total	73	100.0

Table 6 shows the level of the preference of use of electronic legal journals as follows: Electronic/Online journals 16 (21.9%), Print journals 14 (19.2%) and Both 43 (58.9%),.

Table 7: Hindrance to access and use of electronic legal journals

Sl. No.	Hindrance	Yes	Somewhat	Never	Mean	SD
1	Lack of adequate power supply	8 11.0%	17 23.3%	48 65.8%	2.55	0.69
2	Poor connectivity (slow Internet speed)	45 61.6%	20 27.4%	8 11.0%	1.49	0.69
3	Limited access to computer and internet	14 19.2%	32 43.8%	27 37.0%	2.18	0.73
4	Lack of well-organized home page of library with link to the e-journals	16 21.9%	39 53.4%	18 24.7%	2.03	0.69

5	Limited printer in the library to print downloaded materials	26 35.6%	26 35.6%	21 28.8%	1.93	0.81
6	Difficult to read from screen	11 15.1%	21 28.8%	41 56.2%	2.41	0.74
7	Citation problems	13 17.8%	35 47.9%	25 34.2%	2.16	0.71

Table 7 shows the rating of the items on the hindrance to access and use of electronic legal journals as follows: Lack of adequate power supply (Mean = 2.55) was ranked highest in the mean score rating and was followed by Difficult to read from screen (Mean = 2.41), Limited access to computer and internet (Mean = 2.18), Citation problems (Mean = 2.16), Lack of well-organized home page of library with link to the e-journals (Mean = 2.03), Limited printer in the library to print downloaded materials (Mean = 1.93), and lastly followed by Poor connectivity (low Internet speed) (Mean = 1.49).

Discussion of Findings: The findings reveal that 80.8% of majority of the respondents were 500 level, this is because they are in their final year and are gathering materials for their project work. Therein 60.3% of the respondents were female law students which means that, the mostly use the law library more than their male counterpart. This consonance with the study of Velmurugan (2013) which reveals that the majority 85 (67.46 %) of the respondents are female and the remaining are male. Most of the respondents are between the ages brackets of 19-21. Based on the frequency of use, the respondents use electronic legal journals daily mostly occasionally. On the accessibility of electronic legal journals and databases, majority of the respondents mostly access electronic databases like Elaw, Compulaw, LexisNexis and Jstor. This is why Palfrey (2010) pointed out that many faculty members and students report that the vast majority of their needs are met by online databases such as LexisNexis, Westlaw, and Heinonline. Also they indicated that electronic legal journals are very vital to their academic growth and accomplishment because it provides them with reliable information of recent legal issues, it provides relevant information for research, it helps upgrade their knowledge, it helps to write good literature review and link to varied scholarly legal research around the world. This is in line with the study of Olorunfemi and Mostert (2012) who also discovered that law students carry out legal research to be well-informed with the latest development around the world, and to be updated about legal profession relevant to their studies, and legal practice.

Also on the level of preference, majority of the respondents prefer to access both print and electronic legal journals. Based on the observation of Olorunfemi (2015) law students need both print and electronic media for their future practice. Also Palfrey (2010) proposed that the law library of the 21st century will not be entirely digital but a hybrid of yesterday print-based world and tomorrow’s digital world. Finally, the hindrance to law students access to and use of electronic legal journals are poor connectivity of the Internet, lack of well-organized homepage of library with links to the e-journals and lack of printer in the law library to print downloaded materials.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Electronic legal journals are vital electronic information resources that are germane to research development and advancement. It has played a paramount role in knowledge advancement and publication of recent legal issues and developments. Its role in the advancement of legal education is fundamental to quality legal education. However, the application of Information and communication Technology in the law libraries has greatly propelled the use of electronic legal resources which have invariably influence information seeking behaviour of library users. Thereof, meeting the demands of this Net generation students is to provide a convenient and effective means of access and use of information resources. Therefore based on the findings, the study present the following recommendations:

- a. There should be an effective Internet connectivity that will enable law students to access electronic legal resources with ease
- b. Academic institution should develop a library web portal that shows links to all the electronic resources subscribed and source by the library in order to promote easy access and use of electronic resources
- c. Academic institution should provide printer and photocopiers in the law library for students to print downloaded materials and photocopy other information resources, so as to reduce mental stress and also minimize mutilation and theft of information resources.

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